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Ford May Let Delegates Complete Ticket

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President Ford may throw the choice of his running mate open to the Republican convention; House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) said yesterday.

Rhodes, who will be permanent chairman of next month's nominating convention in Kansas City, said after a meeting with Mr. Ford that it is "highly possible" the President will let the delegates choose his running mate if he wins the nomination.

Rhodes himself suggested that Central Intelligence Agency director George Bush could rank with Ronald Reagan and John B. Connally as a favorite if the choice were left to the convention.

Rhodes disclosed the President's interest in convention selection of a Vice President in an interview with editors and reporters of The Washington Post after he and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) had discussed the vice presidential picture with Mr. Ford for a half-hour at the White House.

Rhodes said the President "has certainly not made up

his mind" on a running mate, adding, "The list is large and growing."

"He may well leave it to the convention," the minority leader said.

If that happens, Rhodes said, both Reagan and Connally would be "very good possibilities" to win the support of the delegates. Reagan, Mr. Ford's challenger for the presidential nomination, has said repeatedly there is "no way" he would accept the No. 2 spot, but a Ford-Reagan ticket has been urged by many GOP leaders as the ideal solution to the party's internal battle.

Connally, the former Texas governor and Treasury Secretary who ended his neutrality Tuesday and endorsed Mr. Ford for nomination, has said he would accept the vice presidential nomination. He is a favorite of many southern and western delegates.

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), the convention keynoter, and several others were mentioned as possibilities by Rhodes, but the minority leader went out of his way to praise Bush, the former Texas congressman who has filled a number of diplomatic and political assignments, including the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee.

"A convention which is free to choose could nominate George Bush," Rhodes said.

At the time Bush was nominated CIA director last December, objections were raised by several Senate Democrats to having a man with a political career in the intelligence post.

In order to gain Senate confirmation of Bush, Mr. Ford on Dec. 18 wrote Chairman John C. Stennis of the Senate Armed Services Committee a letter saying that "if Ambassador Bush is confirmed by the Senate as director of Central Intelligence, I will not consider him as my vice presidential running mate in 1976."

The President said Bush had "urged that I make this decision," adding, "This says something about the man and about his desire to do this job for the nation."

Three days earlier, in testimony to the committee, Bush had said he would not "seek any office," but added that if the vice presidential nomination were offered him, "I cannot in all honesty

tell you that I would not accept."

Rhodes said that he thought a convention draft of Bush would not violate either Mr. Ford's or Bush's pledge. "I don't know how a fellow of George Bush's background could turn it down," he said.

Rhodes said that his position as the convention's presiding officer made it improper for him to rate the vice presidential contenders, saying that "any of the three" prime contenders "would certainly add luster to the ticket."

Many Republicans have speculated that the convention would certainly choose Reagan to run with Mr. Ford, if given a free choice, but Rhodes said that he believed "it was more likely two days ago than it is today."

His comment reflected the generally negative reaction to Reagan's announcement Monday that he would pick Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.) as his running mate if he won the presidential nomination.

As for Connally, who was

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